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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 000856

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/AP AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2018

TAGS: PHUM KWMN MU

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT EXPANDS LAND GRANTS TO WOMEN

REF: MUSCAT 802

Classified By: DCM L. Victor Hurtado for Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (U) In some countries you get the right to vote or to purchase alcohol when you become an adult, in Oman, the government also gives you land. Until recently, Omani law provided that all Omani men 23 years of age or older (21 years or older if married) were eligible to receive 600 square meters of land at 1 Omani rial (US\$2.60) per square meter. Omani women were only eligible for the land grant if they were widowed and/or had no male provider for their family. Land grant applicants could choose to have their land in their home village or the location in which they work, although the exact plot of land received is determined by lot. Recipients of government land must hold on to their property for at least two years before they can re-sell it.

¶2. (SBU) On November 16, the government announced that the law had been changed so that all adult Omani women who meet the relevant age requirement, and who have not yet received land or housing from the government, are now eligible to participate in the land distribution system. A contact at the Ministry of Housing told poloff that immediately after the amended law was released, a "large number" of women came to the ministry asking how to claim their land. Another contact reported that "busloads" of women, some of whom were likely encouraged by their husbands, have traveled to the ministry to apply for land grants. Local newspapers published full page ads in December notifying Omanis of the procedures to claim government-provided land.

¶3. (C) According to December 16 press reports, the government has established a new electronic system for land grants in response to the increase in applications from new female participants. When asked by emboffs about the new opportunity to apply for land, Omani women were unanimously enthusiastic. One woman stated, "We should get a day off of work to go and apply!" A senior legal advisor at the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Sarah al-Sharji, told poloff that the new law made things "almost equivalent" between genders with respect to housing and land.

¶4. (C) Comment: Although implementation details of the new law have not yet been fully clarified, the legislation provides a nearly identical framework for men and women to receive government-provided land in Oman. Its adoption removes one of the few remaining legal distinctions between men and women in the Sultanate, most of which are based on traditional Sharia law such as differing inheritance rights. Moreover, the expansion of the land grant system also creates potential wealth for Omanis, especially those lucky enough to receive plots in highly desirable locations, at a time when the Sultanate's economy is slowing down as a result of the global financial crisis (reftel). End Comment.

GRAPPO